

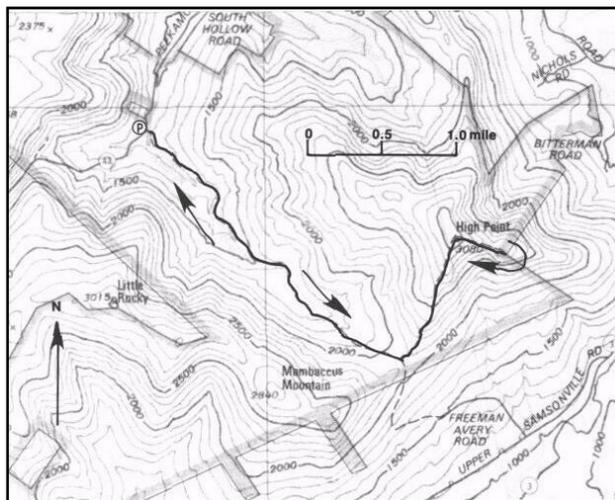
Ashokan High Point

Distance: 7.5 miles

Time: 5 ½ hours

Vertical rise: 1,980 feet

The trail to Ashokan High Point's summit is an old settlement road that has been so well built that it requires little maintenance. The surface is hard-packed dirt and gravel, where few seedlings will hold. It has been so well drained in past years that erosion has caused little damage. Old stone walls and ditch construction protect it from the advancing forest. Only the overhanging boughs that occasionally you will duck under betray any need for trail maintenance, much of which is done by a few loyal hikers and the Boy Scouts. Because it is so little known, the trail also is quite clean. All things considered-it is a rare find in an era earmarked by overuse and exploitation. The trail to High Point shows on the NY-NJTC map as a dotted line, keyed as an unmarked trail. The map is accurate to a point. It shows the correct route to the summit, but omits some side trails that might cause confusion. Don't let the lack of marking deter you, however. The moderate-difficulty trail is self-guiding in its entirety, and it is hard to get lost if you pay attention to the map and text. Find the trailhead by turning south on NY 28A from NY 28 in Boiceville east of Phoenicia. Follow 28A for three miles to West Shokan. Here, Peekamoose Road (County Route 42) runs uphill along the Bush Kill. After 3.9 miles, you will see on the left a parking area. State land and Forest Preserve signs are posted nearby. Cross Kanape Brook to the trail, or jeep road. Follow the trail uphill through a typical Catskill slope forest of beech, birch, and maple, slowly climbing up and away from Kanape Brook, which is on your right. Within ten minutes you will cross one of several stone culverts that run under the trail, draining the northwest watershed of the mountain. These are structures you ordinarily won't see on Catskill trails. Several are completely handmade, the ditch itself lined with bluestone drywalls and capped with larger flat stones that you will walk over. You will begin to see some very attractive bluestone drywalls (not mortared) along this part of the trail, as well as some stone bridges that span seasonal creeks. You'll cross two such bridges and climb gradually but steadily into an area where mountain laurel appears. Within five or ten minutes you will reach a Y in the trail, on which you bear right, staying on the more-established trail. Shortly afterward, you pass a small spring on the left that has been dug by hand and built up with stone. In another ten minutes the trail crosses Kanape Brook into a clearing with a mortared brick and stone fireplace. This is a pretty spot-the brook forms a larger pool as it flows from the shaded conifer forest upstream. Balsam fir now appear, and shortly afterward some larger hemlocks. There are many attractive camping sites all along this trail, particularly through this section. Keep going uphill, never strenuously, for another twenty minutes through a second-growth forest. You will curve gradually toward the east and suddenly reach higher, open forest where the trail turns grassy amid the oak and laurel. You may notice a good trail branching to the right at this point. Keep going, until within five minutes you reach a T where you are in an airy, forested saddle between High Point and Mombaccus Mountains at 2000 feet. There is a campfire ring here and several flat camping areas. Turn left (northeast) here for the one-mile, 1000-foot elevation gain to the summit. Pass a road that goes off to your left slightly beyond the trail intersection, and follow straight ahead, beginning to climb uphill in a moment.



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In five minutes you will pass a vague footpath to the trail's right. Continue uphill into a slide and ledge area over broken rock footing. Views will appear as you climb through this red oak, maple, and blueberry cover on your way through terracing terrain. From saddle to summit takes not more than forty-five minutes. The summit is a small rock ledge with an east-to-southwest exposure, revealing the edge of the Ashokan Reservoir, the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge, the Shawangunks from Mohonk to Minnewaska and down to Sams Point, and beyond into the Hudson Highlands. Carvings from 1878 show in the summit stones, along with several anchor bolts from an early observation tower. North of the summit several trails wander into the woods, one of which leads a hundred yards to an open westerly overlook with good views of Slide, Friday, Balsam Cap, Rocky, Lone, Table, and Peekamoose. This short side trip is a must! Ashokan summit has a fine collection of views to pick from, but what will astonish you most is its blueberries, which are everywhere and rank easily as the best of the Catskill patches. The thick bushes cover the entire unshaded summit, and the unusually large berries remain seemingly unnoticed until harvested by frost. Although it may not seem possible as you stand on Ashokan High Point's true summit, the views (and the blueberries) are better on the low knob you can see just east of you. This is a short bushwhack, some of it on an obscure and for the most part indistinguishable foot trail.

Even without a compass it is difficult to get lost, but it is a good idea for beginning bushwhackers to have one along just in case. This quarter-mile trip to the eastern summit is so worthwhile that it should not be missed. To get there, drop down around the summit's north side on a vague footpath that will disappear eventually, sometimes to re-emerge looking like a well-trodden deer path. Follow east (a compass bearing would be accurate at 125° with declination figured in) and into a saddle with long rock ledges running north to south. The terrain will undulate gently afterward, gradually ascending to bring you out to the open easterly expanse. Figure on about fifteen minutes for this bushwhack. Here you will see many ledges and rock overhangs where you can search for more views, but the terrain is easy. In autumn it is a montage of burgundy berry bushes that grow thickly and reach to knee height. Scrub oak turns the color of brickdust on amber. You can see almost the entire Ashokan, a long flat strip of indigo among the valley's greenness, where colors will change in weeks to come. Spun into the scene are the somber, drab outcroppings of rock that pock-mark the summits and ranges beyond, and the short stilts of battered, nutbrown tree trunks, festooned with the scarlet berry clusters of mountain ash. Looking left (north) from east to west you observe Overlook, Plattekill, Indian Head, Jimmy Dolan Notch, Twin, Pecoy Notch, Sugarloaf, Mink Hollow, Plateau, Stony Clove Notch, Hunter, Diamond Notch, and West Kill Mountain. To the north are Wittenberg and Cornell. To the east and beyond the reservoir are the Taconics and the Berkshires. Moving westward is the long Shawangunk Ridge and the flat plain of the Neversink, Rondout, and Mongaup Rivers. Suddenly Mombaccus again fills your eye, and you've covered about 270 degrees, for what promises to be one of the best overlooks in the Catskill Mountains. You will also be able to see the roads around the Ashokan Reservoir (New York City's water supply), which provide outstanding views of the range. The hike out from the knob and back over Ashokan High Point will take you about two hours. Avoid the shorter southerly access, for it is private. If you have time now, you might want to drive across the dam and causeway on a longer route back to NY 28. Instead of going left when you get to the bottom of Peekamoose Road in West Shokan, go right and stay on 28A until you reach a left turn (approximately six miles) that you will see crosses the reservoir, providing views of Ashokan High Point and the Catskill High Peaks

